



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain

At a meeting of

Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee

Held online via Zoom video conferencing
28 April 2021

Minutes

Present: Robert Almond (co-clerk), Jeff Beatty (co-clerk), Ann Bettys, Mike Coote, Abigail Darton, Ann Davison, Annie Dickson, Adam Drury, Alan Keith, Caroline Kibblewhite, Tim Landsman, Jonathan Lingham, Elize Sakamoto

Prevented: None

Staff: Suzanne Ismail, Oliver Robertson (secretary), Clare Wood

QPSWCC 21/25 QPSW STRATEGY – OVERVIEW

We have spent time at two meetings (16th April and 28th April) reflecting on how to give greater clarity, and better support to the critical next stages around the implementation of our new five-year Work Programme Strategy.

Ahead of these meetings we have heard from representatives of our current sub-committees and groups, that whilst broadly positive and open to full engagement with the process of change, there is concern about the pace of this change, and that some of the detail has not yet been sufficiently developed or outlined. We are acutely aware of the effect this is having on our staff team, as changes in structure to meet the demand of the new strategy have fallen at the same time that BYM departments have been asked to reduce spending budgets by around 30% (by 2023).

When working on the new strategy, the key focus of Central Committee has been to identify what work should be our priority, and how this is best supported, rather than what the budgets should be. In addition, there are significant issues relating to the pandemic, and to wider organisational changes within BYM such as the setting up of regional hubs and a team of Local Development Workers that need to be considered when considering the detail of these changes.

We recognise that this has been a challenging and difficult situation for all; we regret this and are sorry for any pain caused. We look to learn lessons for the future, and are committed to respond to this with love and with as much time as we are able to give. We commit fully within our remit as a Central Committee to a process of change that has open communication; that demonstrates respect and care for those carrying out work on our behalf, whilst being driven by the vision we have discerned for our new five-year strategy.

In our reflections, we have discerned a need for four core actions:

1. **To provide a clear and simple outline – a crystallisation, of what we see as the key elements of our new strategy.** As a committee we have spent a considerable amount of time on this strategy. We are clear on the vision, but can see a need to provide greater clarity on the overarching approaches and changes we seek.
2. **To set out clearly which work areas we believe should be prioritised for delivery and/or support by BYM staff.** Alongside this, our vision is for several work areas and concerns of Friends to be supported and led differently. In particular, to build on an appetite for more work to grow directly from the actions of local and area meetings and/or from Quaker Recognised Bodies. We know this needs considerable work to develop, and in doing this we seek to draw heavily on the input from Friends serving on sub-committees and group, and elsewhere. We hope that this newly prioritised work will also help to strengthen the visibility of the Society, our faith in action and attract more people to Quakers.
3. **To set out proposals on a simplified governance structure.** A structure that is more strategic, and mirrors key objectives from our new strategy. To have greater agility, to be more cross-cutting across programme areas, but which retains at its core discernment by Friends from across BYM on what work is carried out in our name by our professional and dedicated teams of staff.
4. **To make clear our strong support for the processes of re-organisation that are carried out with as much engagement and input as possible from staff.** In line with BYM's existing HR policies we wish to affirm a strong commitment to approaches that avoid wherever possible any compulsory redundancies, by for example a creative approach to redeployment, retraining and staged implementation. In this, we are aware that reductions in spends over the last year have taken us a considerable way towards meeting the call from BYM Trustees to achieve a balanced budget by 2023 and that this can help this commitment.

1. Our vision – the core elements of our strategy

On the first action, we have agreed the following as a set of statements that we hope will provide greater clarity on what we see as the core elements of the strategy:

Guided by the spirit, our vision for this strategy is:

- For our work over the next five years to be focussed around two core and interlinked themes – Peace & Peacebuilding, and Sustainability & Climate Justice.
- To spread our central work programmes less thinly. We believe doing more on fewer areas will achieve more overall.
- Our focus should be on areas where Quakers have a distinctive approach that can enhance change, and help build a more peaceful world.
- Alongside centrally managed work, we will seek to support greater action by local and area meetings and by Quaker Recognised Bodies. We hear a call for greater Quaker witness and activism, and believe more can be achieved on some concerns by this change in approach.

- For our centrally managed work we recognise a need for greater agility – for us to respond quickly where this is needed, even if this means laying down or pausing some work.
- Where this will achieve more and better outcomes, we support better cross-programme activity. Our vision for a peaceful world is not contained in siloes, and the organisation of our work programmes should support this approach.
- There are many gifts and skills in our staff teams and in those involved as members and attenders in the Society of Friends. We value all of these, and whilst small in numbers our vision and yearning for change is expanding.

2. Our proposals for how we prioritise our work programmes

We are clear that it is the responsibility of QPSW Central Committee to set the overarching priorities for our programme of work – whether managed centrally, supported locally, or in partnership with Quaker Recognised Bodies and organisations such as Woodbrooke.

In carrying out this role, we seek to be led by the spirit but also to call on Friends with knowledge in these areas to help our discernment.

We have set out in a further minute (QPSWCC 21/26) our proposals on what this means for our existing programmes, and for the way we might support activity centrally and locally, with BYM staff.

3. Governance arrangements

In previous minutes (QPSWCC 20/35 and 20/51) we set out the six guiding principles we would use to propose changes to the governance of this work.

We value the work and dedication our sub-committees and groups have shown throughout this process and in their governance of parts of QPSW's work.

We will review our governance structure at our July meeting. We recognise that as the work changes, the governance arrangements should match this: if there is a mismatch between work and governance that will damage our ability to effectively oversee and guide the work. We continue to work and reflect on this and will seek to openly engage with our existing sub-committees and groups. We have seen some benefits as well as challenges from being able to meet 'virtually' through IT platforms such as Zoom and these proposals will include some reflections on this.

4. Staffing changes

The terms of reference for QPSW Central Committee do not include direct responsibilities for the management or structure of our staff team. The budget for QPSW is set by BYM Trustees, and they are clear that urgent reductions in spending are essential. Central Committee acknowledges this, and the implications for prioritisation of the work. We remain ambitious in the work that we

are led to undertake, and will seek creatively the best pathways to achieve this, including seeking increased budgets where circumstances and the need align.

We know having a professional, well-supported and valued team is critical to everything we do. We also know that valuing and caring for people working for the Society of Friends is not simply a legal requirement but is itself a 'requirement' of our Quaker values and testimonies. In all our direct contact with staff we have been enormously impressed with the dedication, care, knowledge and professionalism they bring to their work – work that is carried out in our name. For the process of change to our staffing structures to implement our new strategy, and in the way we respond to achieving a balanced budget, Central Committee asks our senior staff to continue creatively to use the spirit and the letter of our HR policies to avoid compulsory redundancies wherever possible.

We ask that the view of Central Committee on this matter is shared with BYM Trustees and with members of Employment Committee.

We send this minute to our sub-committees and groups, and to BYM Trustees.

QPSWCC 21/26 QPSW STRATEGY – IMPLICATIONS FOR WORK AREAS

This minute describes how QPSW Central Committee would like to see QPSW's work develop in the light of the new strategy. This includes continuing work, growing work, and laying some work down in its current form. Alongside this, we seek to build on the appetite for work to grow more from the actions of local and area meetings and/or Quaker Recognised Bodies. While this discernment is the conclusion of our consideration of priorities at this time, we want to work with sub-committees, groups and staff to continue to develop work that is led by the Spirit that is responsive to the world and to Quaker concerns, but recognises that the ends we seek may require patient work over years or decades.

Our strategy highlights the importance of the way we work, as well as what we do. It reminds us of our faith-led commitments to nonviolence, collaboration, justice and equity, and to working where we are invited and welcomed. As a committee, we recognise need to embed and examine these principles within and between ourselves, as well as in the work.

And our strategy challenges us to be 'responsive to the needs of communities – especially those with experience of structural violence and injustice'. We agree with our sub-committees that there is a tension between having 'the privilege to do' and the desire to overturn privilege that is often based on the oppression of others. We uphold our staff as they work to develop a culture of openness, inclusivity and anti-oppression, and we will seek to learn about and practice this across QPSW's governance structures.

Some of our work is Britain-based and some has an international focus. We recognise that many issues in Britain have a global perspective, and that many international conflicts stem from injustice and global inequality in which Britain is complicit. Staff have shared a desire to connect and bridge national and international work. We hope to see mutual learning, collaboration and partnership across all the work, and we hope to better support these connections through our governance structures.

Our strategy asks us to act as ‘allies and companions for communities suffering from violence or oppression where we are invited, to help develop responsive and creative peacebuilding strategies within communities suffering from violence, and to facilitate collaboration and listening between stakeholders’. Our strategy also compels us to ‘addresses the negative impact of colonialism and imperialism, in order to more effectively achieve nonviolent social change’. We are glad that all our international programmes are already seriously considering how to attend to damaging colonial legacies in the work and we uphold staff and sub-committees and groups in this, and ask they share learning and ideas for ‘decolonising’ the work with QPSW Central Committee so that we too can learn.

Areas of work

We see political advocacy, nonviolent campaigning, networking and wider witness support, all as key components of QPSW’s work. We have heard that it is important that we do not create further siloes by approach, so we ask staff to ensure that the work outlined below is integrated and agile, with staff able to collaborate in different ways at different times. We agree with the Economics & Sustainability (ES) Sub-committee that we ‘need to find ways to connect our focus areas of climate justice and peace: that militarism and war are powerful drivers of climate change, and climate change is a driver of oppression and violent conflict’, underpinned by an unjust and extractive economy.

/1 Advocacy and campaigning

Our strategy asks us to ‘engage with those in power to work for social systems, policies and structures that prioritise peaceful and sustainable communities’.

We have heard that we are not at our most effective when we work on many separate political themes, and that we should commit sufficient time and expertise to work in coalitions, to build relationships with policy makers and to support Quakers speaking out alongside and as part of our centrally managed work. There are also times when we will be compelled to speak out on a concern, even if it is not an area we currently work on. ***This has led us to the idea of priority and ‘watching brief’ themes, and we ask staff to further develop and implement use of these concepts.***

We are committed to ongoing political advocacy work on peace issues, including disarmament and militarism. We also understand that other organisations are doing this work well and that some of our role may be in signposting to them rather than duplicating their work. ***We ask peace-focused staff to listen to knowledgeable Quakers and others about where it is important to do Quaker-led peace advocacy, and to work with political advocacy staff to decide on and implement advocacy priorities. We envisage that the need for peace advocacy may also arise from the peacebuilding work described below.***

We have heard that our ES programme has worked hard to define a Quaker contribution to the movement for climate justice that addresses the need for systems change, and that the ES team are playing an active and important role in supporting and convening interfaith networks to engage with climate justice advocacy. ***We wish to uphold and continue this work, and will look for ways, including through our governance review, to integrate the learning and practice with our peacebuilding work.***

To enable us to do the work above in an integrated and agile way, we agree to do less staff-led work on criminal justice as a theme by itself. However, we wish to explore whether this

longstanding Quaker concern can be retained as a ‘watching brief’ topic, including whether there are experienced Quakers on the committee or wider community, who would be willing to work with us to respond to key political opportunities or concerns, as we do on migration and torture. **We ask staff to work with the Social Justice Sub-committee (SJS) to lay down this programme in its current form, in an appropriate time frame. We invite them to share with us ideas about how we might incorporate their analysis into our wider work on peacebuilding, and drawing on expertise from other relevant committees and groups.** We deeply value the excellent work of staff and the SJS and its predecessor committee over many years. This work has evolved to encompass a vision of a transformed system, and we intend that the peacebuilding work described below is a part of building this. Criminal justice will remain a concern for Quakers in Britain, and we will continue to engage with Quakers in Criminal Justice and other Quaker groups working in this area.

/2 Supporting Quakers in their witness

Our strategy asks us to ‘generate wider and more effective participation in work towards a peaceful and sustainable world’, and commits us to ‘developing skills, knowledge and confidence in strategic nonviolent social change’. We know that changing policy and power often requires coordinated nonviolent campaigning, strong networks of people acting together, and deep relationships that can sustain and inspire us in our shared endeavours.

We know that as well as looking to QPSW for ways to get involved in our centrally discerned advocacy and campaigns, Quaker communities and individual Friends also very much welcome QPSW accompaniment and supporting in the witness they are led to do themselves. We have a range of existing work in this area, from Turning The Tide’s (TTT) nonviolence workshops and resources, to the Social Justice Subcommittee’s booklet on power and privilege, and project support from the Grants Group and ES programme. We have also heard from staff that this work could be even more effective if planned and delivered in a cross-programmatic way. Working with Quakers, and helping them to inspire each other, we can be more than the sum of our parts, and more embedded in the needs and spirit of our Quaker community. We see an ongoing need for both thematic support and more general support for encouraging and inspiring effective action. Supporting Friends to witness to the peace testimony in a range of ways, remains a priority.

We ask staff to continue to support inspiring nonviolent campaigning by Friends, focussing on our priority themes of peacebuilding and climate justice, and continuing to find and amplify the energy of Quakers. We ask staff to prioritise this area.

We ask staff to continue to support Quaker witness beyond nonviolent campaigning, which might include supporting local initiatives, building Friends’ skills and analysis, networking Friends together, mapping activity and energy, allocating grants and helping to test ideas and concerns. We understand that a needs analysis is planned and look forward to seeing the work develop in response to this. We also recognise that some of this is beyond QPSW, and ask staff to work with the Local Development Team and Woodbrooke as it develops this work. **We ask staff to prioritise this area.**

While a great many Friends value and are part of QPSW work, throughout our strategy process, we have also heard some concern that there is all too often a disconnect between the centrally managed work and the wider body of Friends. We feel it is vital to address this: QPSW’s work belongs to all Quakers in Britain. The work is strengthened by Friends knowing about it, upholding it and – where possible – playing an active role in it. We are heartened by the

interest in recent events like last year's spring sessions. We hope that it will be possible to build on the learning from this, potentially developing new ways to ensure that Friends know about this important work and how they can engage in it. ***We ask staff to continue to inform and engage Quakers in QPSW's work.***

/3 Networking and movement building

Quakers have often played an important role in offering space or convening networks, for example through our peace programmes, as a part of building wider movements. Increasingly staff have been finding ways to connect Quakers to each other too, so that they can inspire and learn from each other. Our International Peacebuilding Sub-committee (IPS) have suggested that Turning The Tide East Africa could act as an 'international hub or network that shares, promotes and develops the skills of activism, and not just to Quakers'. ***We are excited by the possibilities of learning, networking and movement building in our work with Quakers and beyond, and ask staff to explore our current and potential role in convening and networking, within programmes and across the work.***

/4 Peacebuilding in Britain

We see all our work as part of building a 'just peace', a peaceful world which is underpinned by principles of equality and justice. As part of this, we wish to explore work on peacebuilding in Britain, which considers what role Quakers can play in attending to the deep divisions and conflict in our society. Our sub-committees and groups have asked us 'what are we doing to encourage the important conversations within our own Society?' ***We ask this work to consider the personal and relational aspects of change, alongside the structural.***

Turning the Tide Britain already does important work in supporting Quakers and others to use the approaches of nonviolent peacebuilding, whilst developing relationships with peacebuilders in the wider community. TTT and our Conciliation Group have told us that to transform violent conflict (or the potential for it) into nonviolent conflict, we need both nonviolent action to shift power and challenge injustice, and peacebuilding approaches. We have heard that these approaches are not often combined in Britain and we are excited by the possibilities of learning from the work of colleagues in East Africa as we develop our work here.

We understand that our **Crime, Community and Justice work** has shifted to encompass the concept of transformative justice, which means finding ways to build up more equitable structures, and treats conflict as a transformative relational and educational opportunity. We see all this as linking to the work of Rethinking Security (a partner organisation focused on peace and security) with which our **Peace and Disarmament programme** already has a strong relationship.

We ask staff to undertake scoping for this work, drawing on the expertise and ideas of staff, relevant committees and peace practitioners in the wider community. We understand that TTT have already proposed some possible areas for scoping and ask staff to continue to explore how we can integrate both peacebuilding and nonviolent campaigning, whilst considering how this work could draw on and enhance the peace witness of Friends.

/5 Supporting younger generations (including peaceworkers)

We want work to support younger generations (including peaceworkers, interns, Geneva summer school, next generation of conciliators) to continue. If we cannot do all the work we want in this area, this should be a priority growth area in the future. As recruitment for the peaceworker scheme takes place in the first half of each year, we have time to consider any

changes to this work before the next round of recruitment takes place in 2022. We note there are benefits to both peaceworkers and staff in having multiple peaceworkers, and recognise the importance of having sufficient management capacity to support peaceworkers well.

/6 Peace Education

This work is thriving. An independent evaluation of the programme in 2018 found that the work is 'pioneering', that it is engaging large numbers of people, supporting children to develop a commitment to peace and shifting the culture of education towards peace and justice. It concluded that the work 'is strategically vital to the future of the field in the UK'. We have heard that the programme is providing support for Quaker peace education initiatives, supporting peer learning and networking, and advocating for peace education through the sustainable development goals. The programme also has important links with Scottish and Welsh initiatives and is expanding teacher training as an important way to influence the education system. There are many opportunities emerging through this work, some of which have huge potential to influence the understanding of and commitment to peace. ***We wish to continue this work, and to grow it if resources become available.***

/7 Grants

Grant-making will remain a core part of our witness. QPSW provides staff capacity for Quaker Housing Trust, although it is an independent organisation. Many QPSW grants are ring-fenced for particular activities, but we hope that small grants can continue to support the efforts of Friends working for peacebuilding and climate justice. ***We hope that this work can be better integrated into the wider work of QPSW, with two-way learning shared amongst staff and committees.***

/8 Sanctuary Everywhere

As planned, the Sanctuary Everywhere programme will come to an end by the end of 2021. We are hugely thankful to the staff and committee for their continuing dedicated and excellent work. The programme has helped Quakers to offer welcome to those experiencing forced migration, and it has worked with partners to challenge the unjust and violent immigration system in the UK. The programme has had some of the highest Quaker engagement of any QPSW work, and there is much to learn from this. It has enabled collective advocacy, built a network and brought racial justice work into QPSW. The issue of forced migration is only likely to worsen and we know that many meetings will want to continue to operate and campaign as Sanctuary Meetings. ***We ask that staff consider how it could be possible to retain elements of the network as part of our witness support or peacebuilding in Britain work and to continue working with the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) to advocate for political change. We want to continue the inclusion of people with lived experience across our work and governance.***

/9 Turning The Tide East Africa

The work in **East Africa** is thriving. It combines nonviolent campaigning with peacebuilding, and a strong focus on learning and networking with the rigour of analysis and evaluation. This work is led by partners in Kenya, Rwanda and Burundi, and we understand that there are many opportunities for expansion across the region. ***We commit to continuing to resource this work, tapering financial support in Kenya when possible.*** We hope that QPSW will draw from and learn from this work in its peacebuilding work in Britain, and are glad that Turning The Tide Britain has already been strengthening these links.

/10 Conciliation

We have heard that **international conciliation work** is ‘a calling to respond to situations of armed conflict’, and that the work includes ‘deep listening, establishing and earning trust, and upholding unswervingly our firm belief in that of God in the other person’. We consider these skills vital in responding to violence, dehumanisation and division referred to in our strategy. In relation to current conciliation work, our partners have consistently said that they want the spiritual and practical support offered by Quakers to assist them in their peace process. ***The current conciliation group remain committed to this work and we ask QPSW to continue to provide administrative support.*** We understand that conciliation in Britain may be difficult, in part because of our advocacy work, but we have also heard there is much to be learnt from this quiet, responsive work. ***We ask staff to consider how we might nurture conciliation skills more widely (including with support from the existing conciliation team), following on from our intergenerational conciliation event in 2019.***

/11 Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)

QPSW operates the British and Irish branch of EAPPI, which is a worldwide initiative of the World Council of Churches. EAPPI has the largest on-the-ground monitoring presence of any human rights organisation working in Palestine. ***We want it to continue as the current expression of our work in the Middle East.*** The situation on the ground has deteriorated in recent years, linked to the rise in nationalist politics and the de-prioritisation of human rights and international law, as described in our strategy. Violence and demolitions have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, when international monitors have not been present. Returned Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs), and organisations and coalitions working with EAPPI, have important roles to play in holding the British and Irish governments to account; EAs are playing a central role in Irish advocacy. While Britain has a historical responsibility for harm in many parts of the world, this is very much the case in Israel and Palestine. Quakers have been challenged in this work, and this has sometimes led to rich collaboration and learning, including on antisemitism. This, and the programme’s model of ‘accompaniment’ and approach of ‘principled impartiality’, places justice at its core, which then provides rich learning for all of QPSW’s work. We are grateful to EAPPI staff for so carefully monitoring risks. ***We ask staff to keep us informed of factors which affect the running of the programme and to continue to seek external funding, including increased funding from other churches.***

We send this minute to our sub-committees and groups, and to BYM Trustees.

Jeff Beatty and Robert Almond

Co-Clerks